

# EDITORIAL

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## "Manipur Violence: Examining Ethnic Tensions, Historical Grievances, and the Path to Peace"

GS Paper 3: Internal Security and Development

### Introduction

Manipur, has been witnessing **escalating ethnic violence** and **prolonged unrest**. Recent clashes stem from socio-political and historical tensions between the valley-dwelling **Meitei community** and hill-dwelling **tribal groups** (Nagas and Kukis). The situation has further deteriorated following the **Manipur High Court's directive** to consider granting **Scheduled Tribe (ST) status** to the Meiteis, sparking protests and violent confrontations.

### Current Affairs: Latest Developments

#### 1. Jiribam Clashes:

- Ten suspected militants under the **Kuki-Zo umbrella** were killed in a clash with security forces in **Jiribam district**.
- The violence reportedly began after armed attacks on **Meitei settlements**, a **CRPF post**, and a **local police station**, escalating the ethnic divide.

2. **Shutdowns in Hill Districts:** Following the Jiribam incident, **Churachandpur** and **Kangpokpi**, dominated by Kuki-Zo communities, observed shutdowns, signaling intensifying discontent among the tribal population.

3. **Eviction Drives:** Evictions of **Kuki settlers** in protected forest areas have led to violent protests, with the state government labeling these settlements as illegal and linked to **poppy cultivation**.

4. **Anti-Drug Campaign:** The government's **anti-drug drive** has targeted illegal opium farms, further straining relations between the Meiteis and Kuki-Zomi groups.

5. **Humanitarian Concerns:** Thousands remain displaced due to violent clashes, highlighting the need for urgent humanitarian intervention and long-term solutions.

### Historical and Ethnic Context

#### 1. Ethnic Composition of Manipur:

##### • Valley Region:

- Constitutes **10% of Manipur's landmass**, dominated by the **Meitei community** (64% of the population).
- The valley elects **40 out of 60 MLAs**, reflecting political dominance.

##### • Hill Region:

- Comprises **90% of the land**, inhabited by tribal groups (Nagas and Kukis) forming **35% of the population**.
- These areas elect **20 MLAs**.

- **Cultural Divide:**
  - Meiteis are predominantly **Hindu**, with a smaller Muslim population, while the tribal groups are largely **Christian**.

## Root Causes of Violence

### 1. Demand for ST Status by Meiteis:

- **Historical Recognition:** Meiteis were recognized as a tribe before 1949 but lost this status after Manipur's merger with India.
- **Preservation of Identity:**
  - Concerns over **demographic changes** and **shrinking ancestral lands**.
  - Fear of being marginalized, as the Meitei population declined from **59% in 1951 to 44% in 2011**.
- **Economic Concerns:** Desire for job reservations and protection from **outsider land ownership** in the valley.

### 2. Tribal Opposition to Meitei ST Status:

- **Demographic and Political Advantages:** Meiteis already dominate the state's politics, economy, and administration.
- **Land and Resource Concerns:** Tribal groups fear losing land rights in the hills and job opportunities to Meiteis.

### 3. Forest Evictions:

- **Illegal Settlements:** Eviction drives in **Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest** labeled Kuki villages as illegal settlers, allegedly linked to drug cultivation.
- **Tribal Protests:** Kuki groups claim the evictions violate **Article 371C**, which safeguards the rights of hill residents.

### 4. Drug Menace:

- **Anti-Drug Campaign:** Government actions targeting **poppy cultivation** in tribal areas have added to ethnic tensions.

### 5. Myanmar Refugee Crisis:

- **Impact of the Myanmar Coup (2021):** Refugees crossing into Manipur have heightened fears of demographic changes, especially in **Kuki-dominated areas**.

## Geography of Violence

1. **Valley vs. Hills Divide:** The valley is surrounded by low hills, inhabited by **15 Naga tribes** and the **Chin-Kuki-Mizo-Zomi group**, which includes Kukis, Thadou, Hmars, and others.
2. **Historical Tensions:** The British brought the **Kuki-Zomi** from the Chin Hills of Myanmar to act as a buffer between the Meiteis and Nagas, laying the foundation for inter-ethnic conflict.

## Recent Flashpoints

1. **Delimitation Process (2020):** Census data contested by Meiteis, while tribal groups claimed underrepresentation in the Assembly.
2. **Forest Encroachments:** Tribal groups accused of illegal settlements in **reserved forests**.
3. **Economic Disparity:** Tribal areas, despite forming **90% of the land**, receive less development focus compared to the **Imphal Valley**.

## Way Forward

### 1. Addressing ST Demand:

- **Criteria Evaluation:**
  - Use recommendations from committees like:
    - **Lokur Committee (1965):** Focus on primitive traits, distinct culture, and backwardness.

- **Bhuria Commission (2002–2004):** Address tribal land, forests, and governance.
- **Virginus Xaxa Committee (2013):** Tackle issues like education, health, and migration.

### 2. Humanitarian and Governance Measures:

- **Border Surveillance:** Strengthen monitoring of **Myanmar refugees** to prevent demographic imbalances.
- **Inclusive Development:** Ensure equitable resource allocation for **hill and valley regions**.
- **Repealing AFSPA:** Improve human rights standards by repealing the **Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)**.

3. **Community Reconciliation:** Foster dialogue between **Meitei and tribal communities** to address grievances and build trust.

4. **Economic Upliftment:** Invest in **livelihood programs** and promote sustainable economic activities to reduce reliance on poppy cultivation.

## Conclusion

The violence in Manipur reflects deep-seated ethnic, political, and economic tensions, exacerbated by demands for **ST status, land disputes, and socio-political inequalities**. Resolving these issues requires a balanced approach that prioritizes **inclusive governance, community engagement, and equitable development** to ensure long-term peace and stability in the region.

## MAINS QUESTION

**Examine the role of insurgent groups and ethnic militancy in exacerbating internal security challenges in Manipur.**